

**Children's Services Department
Advisory Committee on Children's Services
Human Services Funding Committee
Fiscal Year 2002**

The Amherst Children's Services Department provides a variety of services to Amherst families and the Amherst community. In addition to providing the community with childcare/early education information, especially regarding the availability of tuition assistance for low-income families, the Director of Children's Services is now also responsible for 1. administering Town appropriations to human service agencies, 2. providing emergency assistance to low-income individuals and families, using interest from the Alfred Field Charitable Trust Fund, 3. editing the Annual Town Report, 4. assessing community needs with respect to childcare and human services, 5. developing new programs that respond to community priorities, 6. working collaboratively with numerous committees and groups that provide important services to the Amherst community and 7. providing staff assistance to the Human Services Funding Committee. The Human Services Funding Committee reviews proposals for funding from human service agencies and makes funding recommendations to the Select Board, Finance Committee and Town Meeting.

Childcare/Early Childhood Education

Each year, the need for childcare and childcare tuition assistance continues to increase. Though there are several state programs that provide low-income families with financial assistance, available funds are not sufficient to meet community need. Low-income families with infants and toddlers face the greatest difficulty in obtaining financial support. The cost of full-time infant and toddler childcare is nearing \$10,000.00 per year, yet there is little hope for an immediate solution. The Massachusetts Department of Education does, however, provide substantial funds for families with pre-school age children (over 2 years 9 months of age). These funds were reduced this past fiscal year, due to the state financial crisis. The Amherst Early Childhood Community Partnership still receives almost \$300,000.00 to both provide tuition assistance to low-income families and to improve the quality of childcare programs.

This grant provides:

1. childcare and/or early childhood education tuition assistance for children from low-income families who are in need of social services, family support and/or parent education
2. childcare tuition assistance for low- and moderate-income working families with three- and four-year-old children
3. partial funding for the local Head Start program to operate one classroom for a full day, giving families who are receiving funds from the state Department of Transitional Assistance an opportunity to attend school or become gainfully employed
5. family support, case management and other services, as funds permit.

The Department of Education requires all childcare programs to:

1. receive accreditation from the National Association for Education of Young Children
2. provide parent education
3. provide staff with the opportunity to improve their teaching skills.

School-Age Childcare

Town Meeting allocated \$16,295.00 to provide tuition assistance for low- and moderate-income families with children attending school-based after-school childcare programs. During FY 02, fourteen families received support for seventeen children attending these programs. These funds helped parents pay for childcare services while they continued to work or attend educational institutions.

The Children's Services Department had received notification, in August, that it would receive a \$26,500.00 grant from the state Department of Education which would enable additional low-income families to access childcare for their school-age children. During January, however, these funds were eliminated due to the state financial crisis.

During FY 02, the Amherst School Department again received over \$150,000.00 to continue its operation of the Amherst Even Start Program, a program that helps parents understand the important role they play in the education of their children. As part of the administrative team, the Director of Children's Services was responsible for programmatic oversight.

Human Services:

The Human Services Funding Committee continues to face difficult decisions, as human service agencies continue to increase their requests for funds. The Committee's priorities for funding continue to follow the guidelines established by the Select Board, namely: 1. emergency services: survival or critical, 2. preventive services and 3. information and referral. Annual Town Meeting approved the following allocations, totaling \$153,495.00 for FY 03, in accordance with recommendations presented by the Human Services Funding Committee:

Amherst Survival Center	\$35,000.00
Family Outreach of Amherst	\$20,000.00
Family Outreach Domestic Violence Prevention	\$ 3,000.00
Not Bread Alone	\$ 6,000.00
Children's Aid and Family Services	\$ 8,000.00
Commuter Resources/Homesharing	\$ 1,200.00
Everywoman's Center	\$ 3,000.00
First Call for Help	\$ 4,000.00
Food Bank	\$ 1,500.00
Safe Passage	\$ 7,000.00
Men's Resource Center	\$ 5,000.00
Big Brother/Big Sister of Hampshire County	\$25,000.00
Amherst Family Center	\$ 2,000.00
YWCA Youth Outreach	\$ 2,000.00
Service Net/Interfaith Cot Program	\$ 5,000.00
Center for New Americans	\$ 3,200.00
Casa Latina Outreach	\$ 5,000.00

The Director of Children's Services continued to participate in monthly meetings of the Amherst Human Services Task force, a group of human service personnel concerned with the social service problems facing the Amherst community; the Early Childhood Community Partnership; the Hampshire County Family Network; the Hampshire Council of Social Agencies; the Strategic Planning Initiative for Families and Youth; the Town Problem-Solving Partnership and the Amherst Community Partnership to prevent substance abuse.

The Amherst Juvenile Diversion Project continues to operate as a program of the Center for Human Development, under the direction of Family Outreach of Amherst. This program continues to be an effective model for services to at-risk youth; though no formal evaluation has been done, the Amherst Police Department and the Franklin Hampshire Probation Department both feel that participants in this program do not become further involved in the juvenile justice system.

Each participant is matched with a “big brother” or “big sister” and required to participate in a community service project. Parents received support and advocacy as well as parent education.

During the spring of 2001, the Director of Children's Services applied to the Massachusetts Executive Office of Public Safety for funds to implement a pilot Domestic Violence Prevention Program. This program uses a model similar to that used by the Juvenile Diversion Project, providing victims of domestic violence with a case manager who will provide support, advocacy and parent education. Where appropriate, parent aides will be placed in the victim's home to provide more intense parent education and support. Victims will also receive funds to enroll their children in childcare or preschool programs, funds permitting. During the program's first year, it served 15 women who were or who had been victims of domestic violence.

School-Linked Services was established by the Massachusetts legislature as a response to the Massachusetts Education Reform Law and is intended to provide human service support to families with school-aged children. The program requires a collaboration of committees and groups concerned with increasing services to families with children between six and eighteen years of age. During the fall of 2001, School-Linked Services funding was used to hire a school outreach counselor to provide support for students who had poor school attendance. It was hoped that this support would increase each participant's chance of academic success. This program continued until January 2002, when School-Linked Services funding was used to replace Department of Education funding for after-school childcare. The school outreach counselor continued working with financial support from a grant that the Amherst schools received to decrease both school violence and substance abuse.

In addition, School-Linked Services funds were used to support Voices for Change, a new program of Family Outreach of Amherst, intended to increase the leadership skills of low-income women in Amherst.

The Department of Education also provides funding for the Hampshire County Family Network, a program serving families with children between birth and three years of age. The Director of Children's Services is a member of the coalition as well as of the executive board, in the hope that this effort will benefit Amherst families and children.

CHARITABLE FUNDS

Requests for charitable funds continue to increase each year. The increased cost of rent, utilities, etc. makes it more difficult to serve all those in need.

TOWN REPORT

The FY 01 Town Report was completed and copies distributed to the Select Board, the Finance Committee, the Town Manager, department heads, the School Department and the Jones Library.

Roy Rosenblatt
Associate Director of Community Services